

INTEGRATING MUSIC ACTIVITIES INTO A SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S  
GRIEF GROUP WITH YOUTH

By

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### Abstract

The efficacy of Music Therapy interventions for young people experiencing grief is the focus of the project. A review of the existing literature on group work in schools demonstrates the importance of utilizing creative counseling methods with students who experience grief.

Although research suggests that music-enhanced group counseling work can be effective, there are few resources available to school counselors who see a need for an effective group counseling curriculum that utilizes music for grieving youth. This project aims to provide school counselors with a music-enhanced curriculum that can assist a group of students through their grief process.

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### Integrating Music Activities into a School Counselor's Grief Group with Youth

Grieving the death of a loved one is a universal experience that most people will encounter numerous times; however knowing how to communicate with and guide a grieving child can be challenging. Worden (2009) described normal grief as encompassing a broad range of feelings and behaviors that are common after a loss. The list of loss reactions is extensive and varied, and Worden (2009) placed them under four general categories: feelings, physical sensations, cognitions, and behaviors. For the purpose of this paper, reactions to a loss will be referred to as grief, and the period of time that a person experiences grief will be called bereavement. Any professional counseling a bereaved person needs to be familiar with the broad range of behaviors that fall under the description of grief, and the commonly held views of the stages of bereavement. Opportunities to advance through the stages of bereavement are essential for the overall health and well-being of grieving children. The American School Counselor Association (2004) and Caele and Christensen (2010) discuss the excellent opportunity that school counselors have to respond to the mental health needs of students.

Unaddressed grief can cause children to feel isolated and alone, both from other children and from their own families. Grieving children may experience lower academic performance, decreased engagement with friends, increased self-injurious behavior, disrupted sleep patterns, or increased physical fighting (Fiore, 2016). When the death of a loved one occurs in childhood or adolescence, Worden (2009) described how these students might inadequately mourn, which could present symptoms of depression or the inability to form close relationships during their adult years. Those without supports are at greater risk than their peers for depression, suicide, poverty and substance abuse. Grief can impact a child physically, cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, spiritually, and interpersonally (Balk, 2011). Addressing grief reactions can help a

bereaved child to function in daily life, and limit the intensity of the loss. Grief support has historically been more available for adults, but support for children dealing with grief is essential to lessen the intensity of their loss and to maximize their social, emotional, and physical functioning (Fiore, 2016). Grief support can be provided by counseling, faith-based approaches, structured support groups, and interactions with family and friends.

Though many studies have demonstrated the effective use of music therapy with bereaved children and teenagers (see, e.g., Dalton & Krout 2005; Hilliard, 2001), little research exists outside of the music therapy context that discusses the use of music in relation to trauma survivors (Garrido, Baker, Davidson, Moore, & Wasserman, 2015). A review of counseling literature using key words such as “grief”, “counseling” and “music” demonstrates a gap in empirical research focusing on music interventions in bereavement services facilitated by mental health professionals. The purpose of this research project is to explore the benefits of group work with grieving children and how music interventions can reduce grief symptoms in order to enhance grief counseling for children. To fulfill this purpose, the following research question is examined: “What music activities will help school counselors address the bereavement process in group work with youth, age 6-11?” A group curriculum was developed that incorporates the research found in this project. The curriculum integrates group work, grief counseling concepts, and adapted music therapy interventions to aid in the childhood bereavement process.

### **Literature Review**

The death or loss of a loved one can have a significant lasting effect on a child. Childhood bereavement can include a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and physical symptoms. These can include somatic complaints, stomachaches, headaches, health fears, sleep disturbances, guilt, depression, school difficulties and antisocial behavior (McCown & Davies,

1995). Children may express grief-related distress in a variety of ways, resulting in problems in school, outbursts of anger, or fear of being alone (Kastenbaum, 2007). Cerel, Fristad, Verducci, Weller, and Weller (2006) found the risk of depression to be three times greater among bereaved children than among non-bereaved children. In contrast to their non-bereaved peers, children have been shown to have higher levels of depression, an increase in health problems and accidents, lower levels of self-esteem, less optimism for success in later life, and statistically significant findings of poorer school performance. (Lutzke, Ayers, Sandler, & Barr, 1997). These studies help support the need for a school counselor to form interventions rather than referrals, when supporting bereaved children.

Children are often shielded from talking about death, yet not engaging a young person in confronting a loss could predispose them to pathology and life-long problems (Rando, 1984). Kastenbaum (2007) hypothesized that major physical and mental illnesses can result in the lives of adults, if they were to experience the loss of a loved one as a child. Cerel and colleagues (2006) reported that approximately 20% of bereaved children exhibit behavior that leads to a mental health specialist referral.

Bereavement services available to children are most frequently provided through hospice organizations or private therapists in the community, though Auman (2007) states that children who have never received mental health services prior to a death are not likely to receive services following a death. For grieving children in rural communities, access to services may be even more limited, due to resource availability or financial strain (Worden, 2009). As of October, 2017 there were no identifiable grief groups available for children in the Fairbanks North Star Borough area, offered in the community or through the school district.

Though children can have varying grief responses to the death of a loved one, it is during the elementary years that children begin to recognize death as final. Wolfenstein (1966) hypothesized that children cannot mourn until there is a complete identity formation which occurs at the end of adolescence, while other researchers (Bowlby, 1960; Furman, 1974) have taken the opposite position and state that children can mourn as early as six months to three years old. Regardless of the adult model of mourning that is placed on children, a key component in children's grief is their emotional reaction to the separation (Worden, 2009). According to Alan Wolfelt (1996), "Any child old enough to love is old enough to grieve" (p. ix).

An essential component of treatment is the recognition of the client's developmental stage. Determining the current developmental stage of each child is crucial in order to understand how the child copes with loss. For children of pre- or early elementary age, around four to six years old, it is common that they may not understand that the deceased will not return. They can oftentimes think of death as punishment for bad behavior, and may display fear of separation (Parke & Gauvain, 2009). As children progress into elementary school age, six to eleven years old, they may often feel regretful when a loved one dies, which oftentimes coincides with feelings of disagreement they may have had with the deceased. As with the younger age group mentioned, this age group can also engage in "magical thinking" and are likely to personify death (e.g., see it as a monster). Adolescents, through age 20, are likely to internalize their grief and can engage in unhealthy forms of coping. This behavior can take the form of experimentation with drugs and alcohol or engagement in reckless behavior (Doka, 2003). It is essential to consider the developmental stage of the client, the appropriate framework from which to base one's work, and appropriate music interventions when approaching mental health work with grieving children.

Tasks for grieving children to accomplish have been listed as (a) understanding and accepting the reality of the loss, (b) grieving or facing the pain of death, (c) experiencing the pain or emotional aspects of the loss, (d) building memories or commemorating the deceased, (e) adjusting to an environment in which the significant one is missed, and (f) making sense of the loss or meaning, and then (g) moving on with life (Wolfelt, 2004), though the tasks do not necessarily occur for a child in this sequence. Henderson and Thompson (2016) caution against guiding children younger than age six through these tasks, as preschool-aged children typically do not understand the finality of death and do not need to rush or pretend to feel differently. Children, around age five or six, begin to comprehend the irreversibility of death, and may ask very concrete questions as they try to understand the loss; by age nine children know that death is final and irreversible (Henderson & Thompson, 2016). Once a child reaches adolescence and is more capable of cognitively understanding the loss, they may show more variations in their responses to death (Santrock, 2014). Due to the similarity of development needs and their capacity to process grief tasks, a unique time period in a child's life can be defined as age 6 to 11. This age group is the target age for developed interventions in this project.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Fall, Holden & Marquis (2010) believed a theoretical foundation gives meaning to the counseling experience in addition to helping counselors better understand the experiences of individuals they work with. There are many models of grief and bereavement; however, the theory used to guide this project is the philosophical approach of existentialism. This theoretical foundation is ideal for contextualizing the effects of grief in a child's life and providing assistance in meeting the bereavement needs of youth. The existential approach is a way of considering human distress, which comes primarily from the work by Viktor Frankl (Frankl,



2006), Rollo May (May, 1983) and Irvin Yalom (Yalom, 1980). Stone and Dahir (2016) discuss the ongoing debate as to whether existentialism is a philosophy or a counseling approach, but describe it as an application that encourages clients to take an active role in shaping their personal reality, in putting themselves first, and in shifting their process of thinking from an outward to an inward approach. One of the main themes of existentialism is the emphasis placed on the individual and the struggle to simplify human existence. Corey (2013) proposed that this approach offers humans a right to choose how to respond to situations outside of their control. Frankl (2006) emphasized that an individual cannot be stripped of their attitude and ability to choose in a given situation, which lends itself to the idea that meaning can be found in the suffering of a loss. Making meaning is a significant aspect in working through the stages of grief. The existential approach can also fit well for children experiencing loss, as it seeks to assist them in developing into a genuine and more attentive being, by emphasizing the self-examination of social components, belief systems, principles and understanding (Cooper, 2003). Understanding the grief journey through the lens of an existential approach allows for a counselor to remain open, self-revealing, spontaneous, authentic, honest, supportive of goal-setting and supportive to children who are working through their grief process in a group.

The social interaction required in group work lends itself well to the existential approach; some of its basic propositions include a person's capacity of self-awareness, creation of one's identity, establishment of meaningful relationships with others, and the search for meaning and purpose (Corey, 2013). Stone and Dahir (2016) discuss how an existential clinician will encourage a student to be open to personal feelings that arise throughout session work, and to be open to inquiring interactions, spontaneity, authenticity, and honesty, which mirrors successful group behaviors. According to Corey (2013), existential clinicians emphasize to their clients the

search for peace and the willingness to confront life's challenges through honest expression. While there are no specific techniques for the existential approach, the style of counseling is intended to be individualized to a person and group's uniqueness, all the while allowing itself, as an approach, to be combined with other theoretical models such as person-centered therapy (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

### **Music as a Therapy Tool**

The importance of music to basic human health has long been recognized, along with its therapeutic use (Thaut, 2009). Since the post-World War II period, the professional application of music as therapy has been recognized as an allied health profession (Davis, Gfeller, & Thaut, 2008). When used by a credentialed Music Therapist, interventions are meant to effect positive changes in the psychological, physical, cognitive or social functioning of individuals, as defined by the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA, 2017). Music Therapy is an established allied health profession, and the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT) states "Music therapy is the specialized use of music by a credentialed professional who develops individualized treatment and supportive interventions for people of all ages and ability levels to address their social, communication, emotional, physical, cognitive, sensory and spiritual needs" (para. 1).

As Standley and Hanser (1995) described, music therapy techniques for pediatric clients have been amply described in clinical literature, and have been extensively expanded upon in the twenty years since their research study.

**Music therapy in grief work.** Several studies from the last fifty years have documented the efficacy of music therapy interventions to ameliorate the effects of grief with clients young and old. Hilliard (2001) believes that music therapy provides a positive medium through which

children can work through the bereavement process. Within music therapy sessions, music has been shown to be a bridge to the development of new insights and new behaviors (Silverman, 2008). A recent study by Iliya (2015) examined the effectiveness and experiences of grief-specific music therapy. Clients of three outpatient mental health clinics in a low-income neighborhood in New York City were recruited via professional referral. The researcher screened potential participants to meet the diagnostic criteria for complicated grief (CG) and death of a loved one at least six months prior to the start of the study. CG is categorized by persistent symptoms of grief coupled with perseverating thoughts and feelings regarding the loss. Ten clients, all with mental illness and CG, were selected to participate in the mixed-methods study. Participants, ages 21 to 65 years, were made up of 70% females and 30% males, of which 20% were European American and 80% were African American. They were randomly assigned to receive either grief-specific music therapy in addition to standard care, or standard care alone. The music therapy in the study entailed verbal processing, as a form of psychotherapy, in combination with active music making. Through the course of music interventions, the grief was addressed through both music and verbal experiences, occurring alternately or simultaneously. The researcher quantitatively examined the difference between pre- and post-treatment scores for the Inventory of Complicated Grief-Revised (ICG-R) and qualitatively analyzed the transcripts of the music therapy session using HyperRESEARCH software. This deductive qualitative analysis helped the researcher to categorize sections of text into a pre-existing framework of Worden's (2009) four tasks of mourning. Both the quantitative and qualitative results indicated that music therapy helped all participants express their emotions regarding grief. They found that participants of music therapy had a greater improvement in grief symptoms compared to those who only received standard care treatment alone.

In regards to the mood and behavior of grieving children, many studies have supported music therapy being a viable treatment option for significantly reducing symptoms associated with bereavement. Rosner, Kruse & Hagl (2010), in a meta-analysis of 27 studies with bereaved children and adolescents, found music therapy to be the “most successful....[and] promising venue for grief intervention” (p.130) of all those reviewed, including music therapy, talk therapy, psycho-education, play therapy, and trauma-focused school-based psychotherapy. Music therapy was used following the tragedies of September 11, 2001, as an effective alternative form of treatment to traditional verbal therapy for children and adolescents experiencing grief and trauma (Gaffney, 2002). McFerran, Roberts, and O’Grady (2010) found that the young, bereaved participants in their study, after engaging in music therapy processes, described music as helping them feel better, since it allowed for a creative opportunity to express their feelings.

Both qualitative and quantitative studies have helped prove the efficacy of music therapy interventions with a grief population. Hilliard (2001) conducted a study to examine the effects of music therapy-based bereavement groups on mood and behavior of grieving children. Forty-three children, aged 6 to 11, were referred to the study by a local child and adolescent bereavement program in an upper-lower socioeconomic area of rural Florida. Participants chosen for the study were nearly divided equally between European Americans (44%) and African Americans (55%). All referred subjects were given a Bereavement Group Questionnaire for Parents/Guardians to complete, as well as a Depression Self-Rating Scale. Of these referred subjects, 19 children were accepted into the study based on their overall bereavement scores, losing a loved one to death within the past two years, and having at least one specific behavioral or emotional problem believed to be related to their loss. All subjects received a pretest battery of psychometric tests, and then were randomly assigned to a no-contact control group and an eight-session music

therapy-based bereavement group. All participants also received a posttest battery of psychometric tests. Group sessions were held at the public elementary schools during the school day for one hour each, and consisted of techniques including: singing, song-writing, rap-writing, rhythmic improvisation, structured drumming, lyric analysis, and music listening. Emphasis was placed on behavior modification, identification and expression of emotions, the intellectual understanding of grief, and the cognitive reframing and reshaping of cognitive distortions. The pretest-posttest quantitative analysis of the responses of the music therapy participants indicated significant reductions in grief symptoms and showed a reduction in behavioral problems at home, compared to no significant differences that were found for the control group. The researcher concluded that music therapy contributed to the reduction of grief symptoms by teaching children a variety of healthy coping skills.

Researchers Hilliard (2003) and Pavlicevic (2005) state that music therapy played a vital role in helping terminally ill children and their families cope with feelings of anticipatory grief. Similarly, in a study by Dalton and Krout (2005), the use of music therapy interventions with youth indicated positive growth through grief after a loved one had died. As to specific music therapy interventions, Fiore (2016) found that children preferred writing songs about actions and feelings that described the person that died over other types of written grief processing. The researcher went on to recommend songwriting as an intervention strategy for grieving children and teens.

Hilliard (2001) found that children who participated in music therapy groups showed significant reductions in grief symptoms rated for emotions, thoughts, physical complaints, and behavior. That researcher also found a reduction in behavioral problems in a child's home environment, after participation in music therapy grief groups. School staff also reported that the

students who attended the music therapy groups appeared highly motivated to attend groups, and often verbalized their enjoyment in participating in the groups.

**Examples of common music therapy techniques for children's grief groups.** Lyric analysis or interpretation is defined as the use of existing songs to facilitate meaningful discussion in individual or group therapy. The counselor or client offers interpretations of song lyrics based on experience, emotional connection, or conjecture (Gladding, 2011). The use of song lyric analysis in counseling has been shown to be an effective tool for evoking and processing emotions with clients (Gladding, Newsome, Binkley, & Henderson, 2008), which can result in a cathartic experience. The researchers also suggested that clients experience a cathartic release when they believe that another person is sharing their feelings of grief, pain, and hurt through the lyrics of the song. Atkins and Williams (2007) provided evidence for successful counseling interventions that included song sharing and lyric interpretation. Buser, Flannery, Bentley, and Gladding (2005) found that students believed songs to be meaningful because the lyrics offered a personal connection to their life events. Gladding et al. (2008) suggested using song lyrics as a coping skill by having clients construct a playlist of motivational songs to be used as needed. They cautioned that in order to be most successful for a client, counselors should allow clients to choose their own motivational lyrics. Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) found that students were more likely to seek out individual counseling at school after they were allowed to explore topics within a group in which the activity involved the sharing of song lyrics. A student who is comfortable seeking out counseling services at his or her school could be amenable to seeing a community counselor for issues outside of a school counselor's scope of practice.

As popular culture is saturated with musical themes, Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) found that emotional processing through song sharing was used successfully with young students as a

means of rapport building in a group. Atkins and Williams (2007) described song-sharing interventions as a way youth could express emotion and gain personal insight. Malchiodi (2008) suggested that song sharing could be an effective way to express emotion and thoughts, as well as a powerful tool to develop a feeling of connectedness among group members. He found that the most profound use of song sharing in a counseling session was the incorporation of client-chosen song selections. He went on to further suggest that as a tool for catharsis and processing of emotion and grief, song sharing could be used an effective tool in trauma counseling.

Roberts (2006) found that songwriting interventions provided structure through music and allowed bereaved children to express emotions, thoughts, and memories about their loss. Songwriting can be a collaborative group process, providing an opportunity for expressing emotions, sharing memories, and building a common bond between group members. Through the lyrical content of songs written, a mental health professional can be informed as to how a child is coping with loss.

### **Use of Music in a Counseling Setting**

Gladding (2011) stated that the use of music in counseling groups helps students become more insightful, confident, and social. Due to its popularity in the media, music's strong connection to child and adolescents can offer an alternative means of emotional expression for youth clients (Buser et al., 2005). Music sharing and lyric analysis in groups have been shown to be powerful ways for students to express their individuality with others (Gladding et al., 2008). Music interventions could provide a unique experience for children to explain circumstances or emotions to others in a group (Kimbel & Protivnak, 2010). Gladding (2011) states that the use of music in a group setting can be a very powerful way for members to find where they fit amongst their peers, as well as being helpful in setting the tone of the group. Some researchers have

suggested that using music in a classroom setting has been helpful in allowing children to relax and be more expressive, allowing for issues to be processed as a group while teaching social skills and fostering social development (Camilleri, 2000; King & Schwabenlender, 1994).

Gonzalez and Hayes (2009) suggest that any counselor working with culturally diverse clients could benefit from the use of song lyric interventions. Strong rapport with children from different cultural groups could be built, while extending unconditional positive regard for the songs that clients choose to share with a counselor (Iwamoto, Creswell, & Caldwell, 2007). Buser and colleagues (2005) encouraged counselors to stay engaged in learning the lyrics that are most important in their communities, and to stay current on popular music, especially when working with youth. This knowledge can help counselors understand their clients better, and provide them a window into personal material (Sue & Sue, 2003).

In regards to the counseling relationship, Skudrzyk et al. (2009) propose that music should be considered a valuable tool for building relationships with clients, fostering a powerful sense of belonging and acceptance, and transcending cultural barriers. Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) also suggest that the use of music in counseling sessions created a deeper understanding of the client, built stronger rapport between the counselor and client, and transcended cultural differences between them. Skudrzyk et al. (2009) found that group members built group relationships through the sharing of songs and formed connections with one another through the use of lyric interpretation. Gladding and colleagues (2008) suggest that counselors encourage clients to discuss shared emotions they might be having in reaction to music used in a session as a way to build group rapport and stimulate healing. Sharing and interpreting songs can be a way for group members to communicate and connect with one another (McFerran & Tegge love,



2011). The researchers also believed that music interventions could be a way to increase group cohesion, as it allowed for members to express struggle and pain to other group members.

Skudrzyk and colleagues (2009) discuss the ability of a counselor to use music as a creative tool for allowing a client to express emotion and communicate mood. According to Gladding (2011), counselors could use music as a way to access and process emotional exploration that might not be accessed efficiently with other therapeutic techniques. He also suggested that since clients have powerful connections to songs and their lyrics, it could be used as a means of emotional expression.

### **Grief Work with Creative Arts in a Children's Group**

Goldman (2004) suggests that creative techniques in grief counseling offered counselors a way to better meet the needs of contemporary youth. A counselor working with children experiencing grief and loss is required to accept the premise that children are the experts on their grief, not the counselor, caregiver, or other family members (Bradley, Whiting, Hendricks, Parr, & Jones, 2008). A counselor's role is to walk beside a grieving child as they navigate the wilderness of grief, assume a curiosity about the child's experiences, and offer several different tools and techniques to expressing their grief. Goldman (2004) postulated that giving a client the space and ability to express emotions is the most pivotal aspect of grief counseling for young people. Bradley and colleagues (2008) found that expressive techniques were important in helping children understand grief and loss; these techniques had the capability to enhance the successful outcome of counseling. As Nunn (1995) affirmed, "It may be too obvious a statement to make, but probably one of the main reasons creative therapies work is because creativity is fun" (p. 27). McGurl, Seegobin, Hamilton, and McMin (2015) found that though there are developmentally relevant strategies that help children navigate the grief process, further research

points to the need for more creative and choice-based services. Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) believe that school counselors and teachers using music interventions possess a creative tool for connecting with students.

Lochner and Stevenson (1988) and Hilliard (2001) discuss the way in which music can be used as a creative tool that can provide a form of emotional expression by assisting children in understanding basic death education concepts. Clarifying confusion or myths about death is an important part of a child's bereavement process, which can be accomplished as an individual is sharing a loss story and expressing emotions such as with instrument playing, song singing, song sharing or a lyric analysis discussion. Oftentimes, words alone can fail to convey the depth of one's emotions, so the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements of music can help serve children when verbal expression seems too limiting (Hilliard, 2008). In an elementary school setting, children from diverse backgrounds can bond, have fun, and learn through their natural affinity for music (Crabbs, Crabbs & Wayman, 1986). Due to the natural affinity that children have for music, Gladding (2011) encourages counselors to use music in order to promote fun, learning, positive feelings and bonding among children from diverse backgrounds. Music can reduce children's anxiety, develop their rapport with a counselor, reduce disruptive behavior, motivate slow learners (Bowman, 1987), and facilitate group cohesion (de l'Etoile, 2002). White (1985) discusses the way in which the use of music in sessions can become a bridge for counselors working with youth. Bixler (2001) found that counselors using music believed in the ability of music to improve focus and maintenance of attention, group participation, student/counselor rapport, and retention of concepts taught.

McFerran et al. (2010) discussed the ways in which music can play an important role in helping bereaved youth come to terms with their emotions by helping to reveal their potentially

hidden emotions. They also discussed the idea that youth use music for mood management as well as expression. Some researchers believe the use of music is a way for grieving youth to express themselves, while others also believe it is a way for children and teens to make meaning during critical times of change (DeNora, 2000). DeDiego (2013) believed that lyric interpretation and song sharing can be effective tools for school counselors and teachers as a method of emotional expression with students, in addition to being a means for helping students identify difficult emotions they may be experiencing (Sawyer & Willis, 2011). The use of song to express difficult emotions can be a powerful way for counselors to empower their clients (Kimbel & Protivnak, 2010).

McFerran and colleagues (2010) found through their research that students enjoy adapting the lyrics of existing songs to describe their grief. The researchers suggested that bereaved youth might feel better when allowed to creatively express themselves alongside their peers. Davis (2010) described how the use of music helped children in expressing feelings, which helped them make the transition back to school after surviving a tornado. Similarly, music interventions were used with young people who had survived a fire, in which the use of song writing and song sharing helped them “hear one another”, bond with others that had experienced loss, and regain confidence (McFerran & Teggelove, 2011, p. 8). Gladding et al. (2008) suggest that through music sharing, group clients may realize they are not alone in their pain, which may lead to acceptance and resolution of the pain.

### **Group Counseling in Schools**

A group has been defined as having two or more individuals who interact face to face with one another, while remaining aware that each other belongs to the group for the same purpose of working towards achieving mutually desired goals (Gladding, 2003). The main goal

of group work, described by Bergin (2004) and Sipe and Eisendrath (2012), involves creating opportunities for members to increase knowledge and skills to ultimately promote positive change and success. According to Pérusse, Goodnough, and Lee (2009) and Green and colleagues (2013), group counseling in schools exists on a continuum from primarily psycho-educational in nature to being primarily therapeutic experiences for group members. Oftentimes groups have elements of each during a session. Hilliard (2008) described time-limited school-based groups as being helpful to maintain continuity for grief and loss curriculum.

**Benefits of group counseling.** Counseling groups are growth-oriented and members often learn how to strengthen their coping skills while focusing on a specific theme. Thompson and Henderson (2011) discussed the opportunities that counseling groups have to help members express their emotions and feel part of a supportive peer group. According to Sipe and Eisendrath (2012), the many benefits of group counseling include: (a) efficiency, (b) commonality, (c) variety of resources, (d) viewpoints and feedback, (e) sense of belonging and commitment (f) skills practice and (g) real-life approximation. When experiencing commonality, group members can discover that personal feelings and ideas are shared with others who have similar concerns. Members can also feel less isolated when they realize others are perhaps dealing with the same or similar issues as they are. De L'Etoile (2002) studied the effect of music therapy on group cohesion and found that members reported it as having significantly increased, after six one-hour group sessions. Being a part of a group can provide a member with a variety of resources, viewpoints and feedback, not only from the counselor but also from other members of the group. Individuals may identify with one another and feel as though they are part of something bigger than themselves. The group can provide members with a safe place to practice skills discussed and learned during group work (Jacobs, Masson, Harvill, & Schimmel,

2011). Practicing skills such as anger-management and conflict-resolution can be a part of group work, which can strengthen these skills in order to be used successfully outside of the group. In this way, group members learn ways of coping and relating within the group that they can then use in their everyday lives (Jacobs et al., 2011).

### **Available Supports**

In August 2017, there were 7,419 music therapists maintaining the Music Therapy Board-Certified (MT-BC) credentials nationwide, according to the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT, 2017). Of those, only seven resided in the State of Alaska, and only three were local to the Fairbanks area. Of those three, only one therapist was offering their Music Therapy services to children that were served by the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD). In the 2015-2016 school year, the FNSBSD served approximately 8,000 elementary students. Given that there were 19 elementary school counselors across 21 elementary schools in the district, school counselors are able to reach far more grieving children than three local music therapists. In place of several Music Therapists who could serve the district's groups of grieving children, elementary school counselors should have access to curriculum and feel empowered to deliver competent, comprehensive grief counseling services that utilize music. Student clients could obviously benefit from the expertise provided by counselors and music therapists working together; however, providing school counselors with adapted music interventions for grief group work could result in more students having access to grief support services. Alaska and other remote- or rural-based areas might benefit from having school counselors who believed they were competent to deliver music-based bereavement services to children.

The appreciation of musical experiences appears to be a universal multicultural experience (Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009) with benefits outside of its use in the clinical Music Therapy setting. Though a credentialed music therapist conducts music therapy, music therapists are supportive of other professionals using music within their practice, and while it would not be considered “music therapy”, music can help support interventions currently used by counselors, social workers, psychologists and other health care professionals (Hilliard, 2008). Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) believe that most counselors could employ some music interventions responsibly during sessions without formal training in Music Therapy. Hilliard (2008) also supported that claim by suggesting that clients can benefit from musical techniques used by therapists but administered by mental health professionals who add adapted music activities to verbal therapy sessions. Gladding (2011) also proposed that several music interventions could be used in counseling without formalized training in Music Therapy.

Clearly, strong links exist between music interventions and cathartic expressions of emotions, and group work can be effective in assisting a person through the stages of a grief and loss journey. The use of music interventions in grief group work can provide a school counseling program with additional value, as program services are relevant to student’s current needs (Vines, 2005). However, van Vurren & van Niekerk (2015) found that although school counselors are currently being asked to have proficiency in several forms of curriculum delivery, they are reluctant to try adding in the creative arts. Several books on creative counseling techniques have been published (see Jacobs, 1992) but at the time of this writing, very few resources exist that specifically address methods utilizing music elements in school counseling. Gladding’s (2011) book explores the use of the creative arts in counseling, but does not directly address the integration of music to group work focused on grief with children by a mental health

professional that is not a credentialed music therapist. Gallant and Holosko (2001) discussed the concept of “music intervention” as opposed to music therapy, which can be used by counselors who do not have a formal degree in music therapy but who responsibly use and adapt music in their practice. Very little is available in the literature regarding a school counselor’s use of music interventions to assist grieving children through group work, though plenty of peer-reviewed literature is available describing music therapy techniques, as seen in the research by Dalton and Krout (2006). Several studies have focused on the use of (a) music and the expressive arts with children experiencing trauma (Davis, 2010), (b) music interventions with a high school population (Kimbel & Protivnak, 2010), (c) music group psychotherapy interventions with girls with adjustment difficulties (Sunah et al., 2006) and (d) children learning new creative coping skills due to divorce (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2011). However, the results were scarce for actual group curriculum although music interventions for individual counseling work were more readily available.

The intended audience for this project is elementary, middle and high school counselors. Although this project will focus on the incorporation of music for a school counselor working with young students in a grief and loss group, the information acquired could be applicable to any mental health clinician who provides services to other clients working through grief in a group setting, such as social workers and clinical mental health counselors. Parents could also benefit by having new and creative ways to connect with their grieving children (Gaffney, 2002).

### **Application**

The application for this project is a curriculum for a counseling group focused on helping children, ages six through twelve, work through their grief process utilizing music activities. The curriculum incorporates music therapy techniques found in the literature, including song lyrics

analysis and songwriting. This curriculum was created by a nationally board-certified music therapist who is also an Alaska-certified school counselor, in order to provide cohesion and adaption of concepts between the two disciplines. The application is for private distribution to school and community counselors to use as a curriculum option for their work with grieving children.

The curriculum created for this project is set up to provide six to ten weekly sessions, with 45 minutes scheduled for each session. Considerations are included that allow facilitators to lengthen the overall session amount and shorten the session length, as might be needed for a school counselor's allowable time. Facilitators are encouraged to be flexible and allow for processing discussion to run longer, to help support the group's growth and need for further processing. The curriculum is intended for a small group of four to eight participants, with a recommended maximum of 10.

The curriculum is called *Our Music Will Work Us Through! (OMWWUT!)*, and was designed to help empower students to own and direct their grief process. The introductory pages provide a rationale of the curriculum, including: the dangers of unaddressed grief, the importance of grief support groups, the effectiveness of creative tools to assist in bereavement, the efficacy of music therapy interventions in grief work, and the importance and ability of counselors to employ music interventions in their grief group work. Five grief process areas are introduced, based on the research model of Dalton & Krout (2005) followed by a brief discussion of the American School Counselor Association Mindsets and Behaviors (ASCA, 2004) to help school counselors provide a rationale for the curriculum. The introduction section ends with additional tips that came from the Harvard Child Bereavement Study, listed to assist curriculum facilitators in confidently leading the group process.



The next portion of the curriculum includes considerations for the facilitator of *OMWWUT!* These begin with the encouragement to mental health practitioners that being a board-certified music therapist is not required to use music to support their practice. Other considerations include (a) adaptability to other age groups and group settings, (b) recommendations for grouping students according to age and/or gender, (c) suggestions for session length and length of group program, and (d) program approvals that might be needed.

The session plan section follows the curriculum introduction and considerations. The group sessions are designed to assist children to work through their grief in a nurturing, creative environment of peers. The initial session covers member introductions, group norms, preferential song choices and overall content of the coming sessions. Subsequent sessions are structured to allow for preferential song choice from individual members, music listening, and song lyric analysis in the way that it pertains to their emotional expression. Processing of the lyrics in relation to the five grief process areas is a large part of the session content. A sample song lyric activity is provided, that places certain lyric phrases into the five grief processing areas. The second to last session focuses on group song writing using the responses from earlier sessions. Individual members are also given the opportunity to create their own unique songs. The last session contains a performance of the group song and each member's original song, as well as termination processing of the group.

Following the session plans, application forms are provided, that include: an informational sheet for caregivers as to the purpose of the group, a caregiver consent form, a sample list of questions to address when considering a student for group membership, and a pre- and post-group questionnaire for student members. The questionnaire is intended to be

completed at the outset of the group, in order to measure current grief levels, and then completed again at the termination of the group, in order to measure progress.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review identified benefits of grief counseling and group work with children. The literature also identified music interventions to enhance bereavement services for children in a grief group. Music has a unique ability to communicate emotions in a way that an individual might not be able to verbalize. Overall, the literature helped inform the question of how to use music activities in the development of an eight-week group curriculum designed to aid children, ages six through twelve, through their grief process. Through this group, children will express their emotions about the loss, identify their current supports, and integrate the ongoing process of bereavement in their daily lives. It is the author's hope that throughout the sessions, school counselors will support the group members, provide preferential music activities that relate to their grief process, and facilitate the group process of positive bereavement.

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Appendix A: Application

*Our Music Will Work Us Through!*

A School Counselor's Curriculum for  
Incorporating Music Activities into  
Group Work with Grieving Students

**Purpose of *Our Music Will Work Us Through! (OMWWUT!)***

Unaddressed grief can cause youth to feel isolated and alone, both from other children and from their own families. Grieving children may experience lower academic performance, decreased engagement with friends, increased self-injurious behavior, disrupted sleep patterns, or increased physical fighting (Fiore, 2016). Those without supports are at greater risk than their peers for depression, suicide, poverty and substance abuse. Grief can impact a child physically, cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, spiritually, and interpersonally (Balk, 2011). Though grieving the death of a loved one is a universal experience that most people will encounter numerous times, knowing how to talk to and guide a grieving child can be challenging.

School counselors have tremendous access to children who could benefit from grief counseling. Due to a school counselor's responsibilities, it might not be feasible to see each grieving child for weekly sessions throughout their grief journey. Forming a grief support group could be one way to fill that need. Bergin (2004) and Sipe and Eisendrath (2012) discussed the main goal of group work as creating opportunities for members to increase their knowledge and skills to ultimately promote positive change and success.

McGurl, Seegobin, Hamilton, and McMinn (2015) found that though there are developmentally relevant strategies that help children navigate the grief process, further research points to the need for more creative and choice-based services. Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) believe school counselors and teachers using music interventions possess a creative tool for connecting with students. Hilliard (2001) discussed the way in which music can be used as a creative tool that can provide a form of emotional expression by assisting children in understanding basic death education concepts. Gladding (2011) stated that the use of music in

counseling groups helps students become more insightful, confident, and social. The use of song lyric analysis in counseling has been shown to be an effective tool for evoking and processing emotions with clients (Gladding, Newsome, Binkley, & Henderson, 2008), which could result in a cathartic experience.

A recent study by Iliya (2015) examined the effectiveness and experiences of grief-specific music therapy, in which the data indicated that music therapy helped all participants express their emotions regarding grief. Rosner, Kruse and Hagl (2010), in a meta-analysis of 27 studies with bereaved children and adolescents, found music therapy to be the “most successful....[and] promising venue for grief intervention” (p.130) of all those reviewed, including music therapy, talk therapy, psycho-education, play therapy, and trauma-focused school-based psychotherapy.

The appreciation of musical experiences appears to be a universal multicultural experience (Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009) with benefits outside of its use in the clinical Music Therapy setting. Though a credentialed therapist conducts music therapy, music therapists are supportive of other professionals using music within their practice, and while it would not be considered “music therapy” per se, music can help support interventions that counselors, social workers, psychologists and other health care professionals use (Hilliard, 2008). Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) believed that most counselors could employ some music interventions responsibly during sessions without formal training in Music Therapy. Hilliard (2008) also supported that claim by suggesting that clients can benefit from musical techniques used by therapists but administered by mental health professionals who add adapted music activities to verbal therapy sessions.

A nationally board-certified music therapist and Alaska-certified school counselor created this curriculum, with the goal of providing cohesion and adaption of concepts between the two disciplines.

Since this curriculum could be offered as a part of a school counseling program, the session plans clearly outline the American School Counseling Association Mindsets and Behaviors (ASCA, 2014) addressed in the delivery of the session content. Social/Emotional Development standards are listed in the sessions, in order to provide adherence to the ASCA program development guidelines of their National Model (ASCA, 2012). Each session plan lists the attitudes, knowledge and skills students should be able to demonstrate as a result of this portion of the school counseling program.

The framework of the grief processing that will be accomplished through the song lyric analysis interventions of this program focuses on five content areas (also called process areas or themes) adapted from the research model of Dalton and Krout (2005, 2006). They identified grief process areas in song lyrics that expressed children's core concerns regarding the death of their loved one and how they were coping since the death. These five themes included understanding, feeling, remembering, integrating, and growing. The way these themes are intended to function within the lyric analysis intervention is detailed in the **Conversation with the Facilitator** section of these curriculum documents.

### **Additional Information About Grief Counseling**

In the Harvard Child Bereavement Study (Worden & Silverman, 1993), 125 school-age children from 70 families were followed for 2 years after the death of a parent. A number of their needs were identified. Worden (2009) suggested counselors target specific interventions towards meeting these needs:

- *Bereaved children need to know that they will be cared for.*
- *Bereaved children need to know that they did not cause the death out of their anger or shortcomings.*
- *Bereaved children need clear information about the death.*
- *Children need to feel important and involved.*
- *Bereaved children need continued routine activity.*
- *Bereaved children need someone to listen to their questions.*
- *Bereaved children need ways to remember the person they have lost.*

Worden (2009) went on to indicate that the mental health practitioner needs to be aware of several things when dealing with children who have lost parents:

- Children do mourn, but differences in mourning are determined by both the cognitive and emotional development of a child.
- The loss of a parent through death is obviously a trauma but does not necessarily lead to arrested development.
- Children between the ages of 5 and 7 years are a particularly vulnerable group. They have developed cognitively enough to understand some of the permanent ramifications of death but they have very little coping capacity; their ego skills and social skills are insufficiently developed to enable them to defend



themselves. This particular group should be singled out for special concern by the counselor.

- It is important also to recognize that the work of mourning may not end in quite the same way for a child as it does for an adult. Mourning for a childhood loss can be revived at many points in an adult's life when it is reactivated during important life events. One of the most obvious examples is when the child reaches the same age as the parent who died. When this mourning is reactivated, it does not necessarily indicate pathology but is simply a further example of working through the extended grief. (p. 235)

### Considerations for Facilitators of *OMWWUT!*

- Facilitators of this curriculum do NOT need to be musicians! This curriculum was created in order to enhance the ability of a mental health practitioner to effectively engage their clients, using the skills of their profession. The music is simply a method to enhance a client's participation and provides a creative tool to express their emotions and help process their grief journey. As Hilliard (2008) states "Although music therapy is most effectively conducted by a board-certified therapist, other mental health professionals may find that the use of music in their practice can support their therapeutic interventions." (p. 78).
- Since a client's grief-journey is individual and they may not be in the same stage of bereavement as others in the group, these session plans are not intended to be done sequentially, other than the Intro Session and Ending Session(s). The sessions are not presented here as activities to "walk clients through the stages of grief." The purpose is to give clients a safe and comfortable place to process their experience, while allowing for group interaction using preferential music choices. The facilitator will have full control over the content processing.
- Due to preferential music being used, rather than a set song-list that might not be applicable for differing age groups, the curriculum should be easily adaptable whether a facilitator is planning a grief group for any age from young elementary aged children to older adolescents.
- When choosing members, depending on the needs and abilities of the community of students/clients, a facilitator should consider the effectiveness of grouping clients together who may have similar (but not exact) situations: members may have lost a loved

one due to death, they may have a parent in the military that are deployed, they may have undergone a divorce in the family, or the student may be grieving the loss of friends due to a geographical move. The appropriateness of mixing children depending on the grief source will be up to the facilitator. It may also be appropriate to include peer mentors in the group, either because they have gone through a similar grief process, or because they are committed to listening and supporting their peers through their grief experiences.

- It is recommended to have similar aged members in groups, for example: lower elementary students (5-8), upper elementary students (8-11), middle school aged students (11-14), or high school students (15-18). Mixed-gender groups seem to work well until early middle school, when gender pressures set in. Ultimately it is up to the style and experience of the counselor as to whether to lead mixed- or single-gender groups.
- When choosing group format, the ideal length of group sessions varies according to the age of the children: 20 to 30 minutes is optimal with children 6 years and younger, 30 to 40 minutes for children between 6 and 9 years old, and 40+ minutes with children 9 and older. The number of sessions for children in a grief group is typically between 6 and 8, due to the realistic amount of sessions that can be provided within a school year structure. This format can be repeated in subsequent school years and kids should be encouraged to “repeat” group. A community mental health facilitator may be able to hold 12-16 sessions, allowing time to deal with more complex aspects of grief. School counselors that may only have a 25-minute lunchtime available to hold a group should lengthen overall program time and shorten individual session length to accommodate.
- Counselors may need to obtain approval to lead the group in their school or agency. Facilitators should consider whether a proposal would need to be submitted, to whom it

would be submitted and what it should include. Multiple online sources can be utilized to help in this process. A thorough proposal should include: rationale based on current counseling literature, needs assessment, goals, consent procedures, specific interventions and activities, and evaluation procedures.

- When preparing song lyric sheets from the preferential songs of group members, a facilitator will need to take into consideration the usefulness (to the group process) of certain songs that contain explicit lyrics. Not all songs with adult wording should be immediately disqualified. If a facilitator deems a song as inappropriate, the member that chose it should be given the option to choose another song before the next group session.

### **Conversation with the Facilitator: Grief Processing in *OMWWUT!***

It takes a special facilitator to brave the journey of processing grief with children, especially when using new program material and with a modality that may be unfamiliar. YOU CAN BE that special facilitator! Though the sessions are not set up to follow specific numbered sessions, the following section should empower you to feel comfortable leading the session process. The structure of the sessions is definitely process- rather than product-based. You will be a member of that process, and less an instructor of grief concepts. Taking some time to familiarize yourself with the elements below will be key to feeling successful in facilitating this group.

As mentioned in the introduction section, this framework of the grief processing in this program focuses on the grief work in five content areas, modeled after the works of Dalton and Krout (2005, 2006). The authors identified grief process areas in song lyrics that expressed children's core concerns regarding the death of a loved one and how they were coping since the death. Those areas have been adapted and explored here, so you should feel confident implementing this program curriculum. First, let's discuss the lyric analysis process, and how that will work with the grief process areas.

The song lyric analysis procedure can look different for each facilitator, depending on personal style. It is recommended that the song lyrics for each child's preferred song be printed out before-hand, in a large font so as to allow further physical handling such as: cutting out phrases with scissors, or making written notes in between phrases. In general, after a preferred song is listened to, what will follow is an opportunity for the child to talk about what they like about the song, what parts they connect to, how they interpret phrases, etc... After they are given the opportunity to speak first and freely about their perspective, others in the group are offered

the same turn, regarding the same song. This a critical time to for you to encourage members to show respect and tolerance for one another's perspective. One of the joys of song lyric analysis is that a phrase can mean different things to different group members. Depending on the age and cognition level of your students, they will have differing abilities to think abstractly or understand metaphoric meaning. Use your judgment and encourage your students to grow, while facilitating the dynamic group process. After or during this lyric perspective-taking it will be your job to help the members identify any certain lyric phrases that could correspond to one of the five grief content areas. This is the heart of the process: using their preferred song lyrics to show how they can relate to the process areas of personal grief journey. You will want to have a large record-keeping system available, such as a white board or five large pieces of paper. Certain lyric phrases may correspond to the one (or more) of the grief process areas, which you will record in the correct column.

It should be noted than even when working with children that may not have functional reading skills, the lyric analysis process can be adapted to meet them at their developmental level. You could hand-pick certain lyric phrases to verbally process with the children, pictures could be drawn in lieu of certain phrases, or you could have a sing-along in order to teach the children the phrases. When working with young children that may not have preferred songs, you should take some time to research popular music and have a few songs selections to offer, screening for usefulness and appropriateness. If the song you pick is unfamiliar to them, be prepared to teach it to them so they can engage in a lyric discussion after becoming familiar and excited about the song.

The first grief process area is *Understanding*, labeled "How? Why?" on the session plans. It is suggested that in the discussion of these grief process areas, you call them "themes" so it is

understandable and less formidable-sounding to children. These will be referred to as themes going forward. Lyric phrases that fall under this theme point to a child's understanding of the cause of their loss, as well as their reactions to the loss. The processing can sometimes reveal misconceptions and/or a lack of information regarding the loss. In that event, further education or information should be provided by you and discussed with the group. Phrases that fall under this theme should help the child clarify and understand the loss. Since this curriculum does not include specific songs to use and you will be working with member's preferred songs, it is difficult to give specific examples of phrases that would fall under this theme. A sample song has been provided after the session plans, to demonstrate the overall concept. Please remember that not all songs will contain all five themes; some may only have phrases that correspond to one theme. Again, it will be up to the child's perspective and your process-group facilitation skills, to interpret them. You can do it!

The second grief process area is *Feeling*, labeled "How do I feel?" theme on the session plans. Lyric phrases that fall under this theme will help children identify and express their emotions related to the loss, including sadness, anger, guilt, frustration, confusion, shock, fear, etc.... Validation and support should be encouraged of all members. Watch for specific reactions from individuals that have and have not been able to effectively process their feelings. Some group members who have difficulty identifying feelings can gain insights from other members who share their perspective on the lyric phrase being discussed.

The third grief process area is *Remembering*, labeled as "I remember" theme on session plans. Group members may express both happy and unhappy memories of times spent with their loved ones, and should feel supported to explore those feelings. Lyric phrases that fall under this

theme may be related to their memories, special times, and aspects of their unique relationship they had with their loved one.

The fourth grief process area is *Integrating*, labeled as “working through” theme on session plans. Lyric phrases that fall under this theme could relate to coping strategies and ways that they could continue with their life while grieving. It could also contain options for support systems and people that they felt they could talk to about their experience.

The fifth grief process area is *Growing*, labeled as “changing” theme on session plans. Lyric phrases that fall under this theme could relate to identification of life changes since the loss. Members could explore ways that they have grown personally, including role and relationship changes, new responsibilities, participation in new activities. The emphasis is identification of positive personal growth experiences as a result of working through the loss. Strength identification is a common component of this theme.

As you start discussing the phrases with your group, you will probably find that certain lyrics seem to belong to more than one theme. This is great – use the strengths of the group process and let them decide where it should belong. See the “Sample Song and Themes” sheet for an example of how this might look. Another variation is to let each group member make their own 5-theme list for each song, rather than having them agree as to which theme a phrase should be in. Depending on age and developmental level of your members, their wishes, and your professional judgment, please feel free to adapt the process in order to best serve your students.

As to the playback system for the songs, this can be as extensive or basic as your resources allow. It is effective to simply use your phone/iPad/laptop and pull up the preferential song from a number of different music sharing apps. Most songs, even new popular songs, are available to listen to at no charge on YouTube. All you would need is a small speaker that plugs



into the phone jack on your device. As the facilitator, it is your responsibility to listen to your members' song choices first, and to prepare the lyric sheets. This will ensure that you can access the songs, and that the lyrics are appropriate enough for the age group. As discussed in the introduction, do not immediately discount their song choices that contain explicit lyrics, until weighing the pros and cons of its use in the group.

You may choose to let your group members sing along during the song playback or not, depending on whether you feel this is too much of a distraction from the lyric content. One option is to have the members be silent and follow along on their lyric sheets during the first time the song is played, and then allow them to sing along to the song after you have conducted the discussion/processing portion of the group. Younger children greatly enjoy the opportunity to sing their favorite songs, so this can be used as an incentive at the end of the group session.

To determine which member's song is listened to and analyzed for the session: drawing a name out of a hat, or asking who wants to go, or choosing the student the previous week are all acceptable; consider what works best for your group and their motivation to come to the group. Knowing their song could be chosen for that week can provide an incentive for them to continue showing up to group. Having all the song lyrics ready is a key component in being prepared for this.

### **Grief Group Session: First**

**Session Purpose:** Introductions, group norms, overview of content

**Objectives:** Participants will:

- Start to develop collaborative relationship with peers in the group
- Establish their group norms
- Be given the opportunity to talk about their grief
- Contribute preferential songs to the upcoming session content

### **ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors / Student Standards**

Mindsets: M1-M6

Behaviors:

- B-LS 2. Demonstrate Creativity
- B-LS 3. Use time-management, organizational and study skills
- B-LS 8. Actively engage in challenging coursework
- B-SMS 2. Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control
- B-SMS 6. Demonstrate ability to overcome barriers to learning
- B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listening skills
- B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students
- B-SS 3. Create relationships with adults that support success
- B-SS 6. Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills
- B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

### **Materials needed:**

- Paper to record group responses

### **Preparation:**

Before the group meeting, gather supplies and read through the curriculum, including the “Conversation with the Facilitator”. See *Optional Activity* below for more materials needed

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Have a short discussion about the purpose of the group, and go around the room for introductions
2. Introduce members to the format of the upcoming sessions, which will be playing, and talking about, their favorite songs. Tell them that at the end of today’s meeting, they will be asked to give you names of their favorite songs, and some of them (at least one per member) will be played in your upcoming meetings.
3. Talk about group norms (reword if necessarily for younger children) and give everyone the opportunity to contribute at least one idea. Encourage members to brainstorm, and record all their answers. Decide, as a group, which ones they all agree on, and discuss group confidentiality.

4. Give the opportunity for everyone to share the source of their grief, as well as how they are coping since. Give members the opportunity to skip this part, if needed.
5. Give more details about what will happen in upcoming sessions, and briefly discuss the group songwriting activity at the end. Have everyone contribute at least 2 songs, which you will write down.
6. Thank them for coming, and indicate what song you will be listening to first next week (if applicable).

Post-session tasks: Write up the group norms that were agreed upon, and prep all the songs. For each: go on the Internet to find the lyrics, copy into a word doc, print out enough copies for everyone. Also, make sure that you can access the songs from your device, and have a way to play/amplify songs.

**Optional Activity:** If there is time and you believe there is a need to use the music-listening as a motivational tool to ensure their continued attendance: have an introductory song prepped, something strength-based, and listen to it during this first session. Make sure it is something they will know and connect to (from current popular music) *Suggestions from current time period: Roar or Firework by Katy Perry, Shake It Off by Taylor Swift,*

### **Grief Group Session: Subsequent**

**Session Purpose:** Song lyric analysis and processing of the five grief themes

**Objectives:** Participants will:

- Develop collaborative relationship with peers in the group
- Be given an opportunity to express their feelings and identify emotions
- Identify meaningful phrases and experiences that relate to their grief journey

### **ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors / Student Standards**

Mindsets: M1-M6

Behaviors:

B-LS 2. Demonstrate Creativity

B-LS 2. Demonstrate Creativity

B-LS 9. Gather evidence and consider multiple perspectives to make informed decisions

B-SMS 2. Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control

B-SMS 5. Demonstrate perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals

B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem

B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities

B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listening skills

B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students

B-SS 3. Create relationships with adults that support success

B-SS 4. Demonstrate empathy

B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

### **Materials needed:**

- Preprinted preferential song lyric sheets from all group members
- Large white board and markers, OR 5 large sections of paper
- Sound system to play song
- Device to play the preferential song

### **Preparation:**

Before the group meeting, gather supplies and read through the curriculum, including the “Conversation with the Facilitator”. It may be helpful to have a copy of the “Sample Song and Theme Categorization” with you, to use as an aid in discussion.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Review the group norms that were established last session
2. Choose whose song will be listened to and talked about today
3. Give each member a copy of the lyric sheets you have prepared
4. Listen to the song and have them follow along to the printed lyrics – *suggested that this first time, without singing along*

5. Give the member (with the song choice) the opportunity to discuss the lyrics first. Prompt the member for further discussion such as what a certain phrase means, which phrases seem strong/weak, what the songwriter was thinking about, guesses as to what else the phrase could mean, etc..... This can continue for as long as they are willing to participate in the process
6. Open it up to other members to contribute their perspective on the lyric phrase interpretation
7. During or after this analysis of the meaning and connection to the lyrics, start a discussion as to whether certain lyric phrases may fit into any of the five themes brought up last week
8. Write the following headings on the white board or paper, with plenty of room underneath. Include: 1 - How? Why?, 2 - How do I feel?, 3 - I Remember, 4 - Working Through, and 5 – Changing
9. Use the remaining time to determine what lyric phrases, if any, should fit into the five grief themes
10. End with another listen to the song – *ok to sing along*
11. Choose next week's song, if applicable
12. Thank the group for participating, and record their responses – keep the paper or copy what was written on the whiteboard. Next week's responses will be added to these 5 lists

*Repeat this procedure each week, until all members have had the opportunity for their song to be the focus of the week, and until there are several responses in each of the five grief theme categories. After these subsequent sessions have been fully addressed, move on to the songwriting and termination session.*

### **Sample Song and Theme Categorization**

*This is an example of how a popular song, one preferred by a group member, could be used in this grief group curriculum*

#### **Stressed Out – 21 Pilots**

I wish I found some better sounds no one's ever heard,  
I wish I had a better voice that sang some better words,  
I wish I found some chords in an order that is new, I wish I didn't have to rhyme every time I sang,  
I was told when I get older all my fears would shrink, But now I'm insecure and I care what people think.  
My name's 'Blurryface' and I care what you think. My name's 'Blurryface' and I care what you think.

Wish we could turn back time, to the good ol' days,  
When our momma sang us to sleep but now we're stressed out.  
Wish we could turn back time, to the good ol' days,  
When our momma sang us to sleep but now we're stressed out. We're stressed out.

Sometimes a certain smell will take me back to when I was young,  
How come I'm never able to identify where it's coming from,  
I'd make a candle out of it if I ever found it, Try to sell it, never sell out of it, I'd probably only sell one  
It'd be to my brother, 'cause we have the same nose,  
Same clothes homegrown a stone's throw from a creek we used to roam,  
But it would remind us of when nothing really mattered,  
Out of student loans and treehouse homes we all would take the latter.

We used to play pretend, give each other different names,  
We would build a rocket ship and then we'd fly it far away,  
Used to dream of outer space but now they're laughing at our face,  
Saying, "Wake up, you need to make money." Yo.

#### **Taking the lyric phrases and finding their grief themes:**

1. **How? Why?**  
I was told
2. **How do I feel?**  
I'm insecure  
Stressed out  
I'm never able to identify
3. **I Remember**  
The good old days  
Back to when I was young  
Stone's throw from a creek we used to roam  
When nothing really mattered  
We used to play pretend
4. **Working Through**  
I wish I had a better voice
5. **Changing**  
I care what people think

### **Grief Group Session: Songwriting / Termination 1 of 2**

**Session Purpose:** Writing a personal song of the five grief themes

**Objectives:** Participants will:

- Collaborate with peers to create a group song about the journey through grief
- Work independently and create their own song
- Begin the group termination process

#### **ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors / Student Standards**

Mindsets: M1-M6

Behaviors:

- B-LS 2. Demonstrate Creativity
- B-LS 3. Use time-management, organizational and study skills
- B-LS 4. Apply self-motivation and self-direction to learning
- B-LS 6. Set high standards of quality
- B-LS 7. Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/emotional goals
- B-LS 8. Actively engage in challenging coursework
- B-SMS 2. Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control
- B-SMS 3. Demonstrate ability to work independently
- B-SMS 5. Demonstrate perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals
- B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem
- B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities
- B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listening skills
- B-SS 4. Demonstrate empathy
- B-SS 6. Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills
- B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

#### **Materials needed:**

- Large white board and markers, OR large piece of paper
- Established lists from past sessions, re: five grief themes – copies for each, or largely displayed

#### **Preparation:**

Before the group meeting, gather the collaborative grief theme lists from the last several weeks, and make copies of the songwriting template for each member.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Explain that today will be the next-to-last meeting of the group, and that you will be writing a group song together, from your 5 lists you've been working on. Explain that they will also be given the opportunity to create their own song near the end of today's group, if they'd like to.

2. Display the songwriting template (see next page) and ask for phrase contributions – 4 for each theme. For this group song, phrases should come from the established lists. *This might be difficult, for the group to agree on which phrases to include. If necessary, expand each section to include one contribution from each member. (Five phrases in each section if there are 5 members.)*
3. Once you have filled in all 20 phrases, give the members an opportunity to create their own song, if they want. Pass out blank songwriting templates.
4. Play a quiet song during the time that they members are working on their songs – give them some time to work independently.
5. Gather their songs and tell them they will get them back next week, when the group song is performed, though their independent songs won't be performed unless they want them to.
6. Thank the group and remind them that next week will be their last formal meeting. Discuss termination concerns that might arise.

Post-session tasks: If you don't feel up to the task, collaborate with your school's music teacher or another individual you may know who can play a guitar or piano to come up with a song structure that can support the lyric phrases of the songwriting activity. Make sure they have clearance by your facility for them to be present for your final session. Using the group songwriting responses, have you or your musical performer write an easy (I-IV-V chords) melody to sing the 20 phrases along to. This song structure could also come from an existing popular song, in which the new phrases would simply replace the original lyrics, but using the same chords and melody. Make sure the performer is able to adapt the member's individual songs in the same way, in order to play them for the group if the member wants. Ensure that the performer is available to attend the final session!



Songwriting for *Our Music Will Work Us Through!*

**How? Why?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**How do I feel?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**I Remember**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Working Through**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Changing**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Grief Group Session: Song-sharing / Termination 2 of 2**

**Session Purpose:** Original song-sharing, and termination of the group

**Objectives:** Participants will:

- Continue with the group termination process
- Hear the group song performed
- Hear their individual songs performed

#### **ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors / Student Standards**

Mindsets: M1-M6

Behaviors:

B-LS 10. Participate in enrichment and extracurricular activities

B-SMS 5. Demonstrate ability to overcome barriers to learning

B-SMS 8. Demonstrate the ability to balance school, home and community activities

B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

#### **Materials needed:**

- Performer and their instrument(s)
- Group songwriting sheets

#### **Preparation:**

Meet with the performer, type up the group song from last week, and make copies for each member. Bring their individual song sheets.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Introduce the performer and talk about confidentiality concerns.
2. Review the group process journey of the last several weeks.
3. Have an open discussion about termination concerns members may have.
4. Pass out group song and perform.
5. Hand back members individual songs and ask if any of them would like them played for the group (*Giving the members the opportunity to stay after the group and have the performer play it for them individually might be nice for them as well, if they are hesitant to have their original songs played in front of the group.*)
6. Facilitate a feedback discussion and address final concerns about life after the group ends. *If applicable, discuss the next grief group they are invited to attend.*

## Appendix B: Application Forms

**Information for Caregivers  
About *Children with Grief* Group**

**Purpose of the group:** Unresolved grief can have long-term implications for children. Grieving children need a place to receive support, talk about their experiences of the loss, and realize that they are not alone in these experiences or feelings. This group will focus on supporting children as they are on their journey through grief, as well as promoting new skills to cope with the feelings and experiences related to the loss. Whether they have lost a loved one due to death, have a loved one deployed or missing, are missing friends or family they have had to be apart from, or are experiencing other types of grief such as a divorce, we want to support them here at school.

We have formed this group for a couple of reasons. The first is that people, particularly children, are often uncomfortable talking about their grief. This group will encourage them to talk about it and give them a safe place to do so. Second, children tend to talk to each other better than they do to adults, and so this will be a place for your child to express some of his or her thoughts and feelings about the loss with other children who are having similar experiences. Hopefully, your child will find others that he or she can talk with long after the group ends. Because children who are experiencing a loss are encouraged to join, as well as those that may have experienced one in the past and/or want to be a helpful mentor to other grieving children, the groups are not designed just for those who are having problems.

The group counselors are responsible for using their knowledge of group dynamics to promote and facilitate individual and group growth. They are also responsible for creating an atmosphere of trust and support through specific ground rules, discussion of confidentiality and their direction of each session.

**Topics to be addressed in this group:** It is important to provide children with information about the grief process. The group leaders will provide some structure regarding the issues to be addressed in each session. Various topics may be covered in the group, including understanding, feeling, remembering, integrating, and growing through their grief process. Some of our goals may be:

1. helping children gain an accurate picture of the grief process through discussion and information,
2. normalizing their common experiences and feeling about grief,
3. providing a safe and supportive place to talk about grief-related concerns,
4. helping children label, understand, and express feelings about their loss,
5. assisting children in developing new coping skills to deal with the feelings and situations experiences as a result of the loss,
6. helping children focus on the positive aspects of their family structure

**Caregiver Consent Form for  
*Children with Grief Group***

This is to certify that I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby voluntarily agree to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in a children of grief group at XXX school under the leadership of \_\_\_\_\_.

I understand that my child will attend a small group experience that will focus on various issues related to their loss. The group will meet once a week for approximately X weeks for XX minutes each week.

I understand that any information that I and my child provide will remain confidential except as discussed below.

I understand that if my child discloses that a minor is being abused or neglected in any way, the group facilitator is required by law to report this information to Child Protective Services, even without my permission to do so.

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions that I have. I am aware that if I have any more questions, I may contact XXXX at XXX number.

---

Caregiver's Signature

---

Date

---

Caregiver's Signature

---

Date

*Please return this form to XXX by XXXX.*

*Thank You!!!*

**Sample List of Questions  
to Ask in a Child's Interview**

Hi, as you may know I am XXXX, your school counselor. I am starting a group for children who have experienced some type of big loss and would like a safe place to talk about it. Hopefully 5 or 6 children will want to talk about it, and we will do some really neat stuff when we get together. We will be using a lot of music to help us talk, and to help us do some problem-solving. You will get to have your own favorite songs played in at least one of our meetings. Would you be interested in joining? It would be kind of like a club; we would decide on a name and rules, and then do some fun stuff together.

What are some of your favorite songs that you hear on the radio, or dance to, or listen to with your family?

*Try to get information about the following topics:*

- Who died, or who are they apart from?
- When/how did that happen?
- What was their relationship before the loss?
- Who else in the family is affected?
- What is the relationship like with those remaining?
- What supports does the child have now?
- Happy memories before the loss?
- Sad memories since the loss?
- Willingness to participate in a group?
- Ability to follow directions and answer questions asked of him/her?
- Topics they may want to talk about in the group?

**Pre-Post Questionnaire  
for Children with Grief Group**

*Since my loved one died or went away:*

(please circle one for each question)

1. Looking at photos and pictures of my loved one is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

2. Letting myself cry and feel my sadness about the loss is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

3. Finding people that understand and support the way I feel about it is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

4. Believing that some positive things have happened in my life since the loss is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

5. Accepting that it happened and that it's not just a bad dream is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

6. Remembering the happy memories and times we had is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

7. Expressing my anger about the loss in healthy ways is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

8. Finding someone who could be there for me like my loved one is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

9. Thinking about life without my loved one is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy*

*Hard*

10. Thinking about my loved one like they are still here is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

11. Being positively involved in school, friends and hobbies since the loss is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

12. Understanding about the normal process of grief is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

13. Feeling guilty about things I should have said or done before my loved one was gone is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

14. Worry that someone else in my family might die or go away is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

15. Taking care of myself and staying healthy since the loss is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

16. Celebrating holidays and birthdays without my loved one here is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

17. Finding new interests and hobbies is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

18. Feeling like my loved one's spirit is always with me is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

19. Making new friends and emotional connections with people is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

20. Creating songs, stories and drawings about my loved one's life is:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

*Easy**Hard*

*\*adapted from Dalton and Krout (2005)*

## Appendix C: Application References

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